

## Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

### Annual Family Support Plan

State Fiscal Year 2016

#### I. **BACKGROUND:**

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) is organized pursuant to M. G. L. ch. 6 paragraph 74-84 and operates programs authorized by State law, the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and by the Social Security Act. The MRC provides a comprehensive array of services to individuals with significant disabilities, intended to promote equality, empowerment and independence and to "create opportunities for independent living and work."

The MRC serves individuals with all types of disabilities as its constituency. While each MRC program has a unique focus and eligibility criteria, the Commission's overall mandate and purpose are to assist eligible individuals with disabilities, regardless of age, nature of disability or functional ability to maximize quality of life and self-sufficiency in the community. Consistent among all services and across all programs, is a consumer-focused and consumer-directed planning and service delivery process that respects, and is driven by, informed decisions of empowered consumers.

In general, consumers of MRC services are individuals with disabilities who choose to control their involvement with MRC personally. In many cases, the provision of service to the *individual* is, by nature, a support to the family. For example, assisting a disabled youth who is transitioning to adulthood to find accessible, affordable housing and long term services and supports necessary to live independently does help the family who, until that time, may have provided all of the assistance necessary to keep that individual home and out of institutional care. This independence can be achieved with the support from such MRC programs and services as Home Modifications, Assistive Technology, MassAccess Housing Registry, Transition to Adulthood Programs (operated by Independent Living Centers), Turning 22 Supported Living, and Brain Injury Services, among others.

Additionally, an individual's (and thus their family's) economic status and self-sufficiency can be enhanced through MRC's Vocational Rehabilitation Services to gain employment, or through MRC's Disability Determination Services that may aid the individual's application for Social Security benefits.

Although MRC is primarily an adult service system, there are a number of programs that are also available to, or of direct benefit to, children and youth with disabilities. Specifically, the Turning 22 Supported Living Program, Transition to Adulthood Programs, Family Assistance Services of the Statewide Head Injury Program, the Home Modification Loan Program, MassHousing Registry, and the services under the Assistive Technology Programs including the AT Loan Program, the MassMatch School Swap, and the newest program, Requipment are frequently utilized by families with children or young adults with disabilities.

Additionally, as the state agency designated to implement the Money Follows the Person Community Supports Waiver, MRC is assisting eligible young adults graduating from the Mass. Hospital School who are able to transition into community settings with a range of waiver services.

## **II. FAMILY EMPOWERMENT AND SUBSTANTIAL CONSULTATION:**

Consumer involvement has long been an integral aspect of all MRC programs and services and is integrated into service delivery and day to day operations of the agency. This begins with involvement of the consumer and, when appropriate, his or her legal guardian, in all aspects of development and implementation of his/her individual service plan, individual transition plan, or individual plan for employment.

Furthermore, consumer input is solicited through a variety of means, for the purposes of informing agency decision-making, program evaluation, planning and development. Avenues for consumer involvement include: focus groups, formal and informal advisory committees, surveys and needs assessments and utilization of Individual Consumer Consultants who are engaged to share their expertise and experience and consult on specific projects.

In FY'15, specific avenues for obtaining substantial consultation have included:

- Regular meetings of program-specific and topic-specific advisory committees, including: State Rehabilitation Council; Statewide Independent Living Council; Assistive Technology Advisory Council; the Home Care Assistance Program Advisory Committee; and subcommittees of the State Rehabilitation Council that include Artists Beyond Challenges and Learning Disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder Task Force
- On-going communication with disability awareness and advocacy organizations including the Massachusetts Brain Injury Association, the Federation for Children with Special Needs, the Spinal Cord Injury

Association, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, United Cerebral Palsy, and the Aspergers Association of New England to obtain regular feedback regarding the needs of their constituents and the effectiveness of MRC's programs and services in addressing those needs.

- MRC contracts with 11 consumer-directed Independent Living Centers that provide peer support, skills training in self-advocacy and skills necessary for independent living, and systems advocacy on a broad range of issues that impact the lives of individuals with disabilities. MRC maintains a system of regular communication with these centers regarding issues of concern to the community, types of services delivered, and types of supports most needed
- Participation and collaboration with other state agencies on MassHealth's MFP Stakeholders group. Representatives of the MRC Waiver Unit, which implements the MFP Community Living Waiver for MassHealth, actively participate in the stakeholder meetings, consulting with MassHealth in setting the agenda, presenting information, encouraging membership among consumers, their family members and providers and utilizing stakeholder feedback in program development
- Involvement of Individual Consumer Consultants in RFR development and review of responses, interview committees, and program-specific projects throughout the agency
- Consumer satisfaction surveys
- Consumer Needs Assessment survey
- Participation at all meetings of the Statewide Independent Living Council and support and consultation to its subcommittees
- An annual Consumer Conference, now regularly co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). The conference is planned by a committee of consumers and staff of the 4 sponsoring organizations
- The Consumer Conference incorporates workshops, information tables and opportunities to provide input into the operations of MRC through focus groups run by the department of Research, Development and Program Planning. The FY'15 conference continued to incorporate an Assistive Technology Resource Room in which consumers could learn about available assistive technology, test various devices, explore funding options and receive consultation from AT experts.

### **III. FAMILY LEADERSHIP:**

MRC remains committed to enhancing the skills, confidence and self-advocacy of individuals with disabilities and their families, as demonstrated by FY'15 activities and accomplishments:

- The Brain Injury and Statewide Specialized Community Services Department (BISSCS) provided Technical Assistance to schools, to address specific students' needs, and provide general information and assistance to educators on how to effectively work with students with brain injuries
- BISSCS also provided Family Assistance and Consultation to support families in managing behavioral or other challenges related to the family member with a brain injury, thereby enhancing the family's ability to successfully support their family member.
- BISSCS's Homeless Project continued to provide supports to families in need of housing and stabilization services
- Through a contract with the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, support groups and training sessions were held to enable families to provide the right kinds of support to enable their members with brain injuries to live successfully in the community
- As MRC emphasizes empowering the individual with the disability, the agency continued to build opportunities for youth development through mentoring, skills training, peer supports and youth leadership training:
  - MRC worked with Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD) to build the Statewide Mentorship Program. PYD continued to increase the number of mentor-mentee matches, now at over 70. Additionally, PYD has expanded to the Springfield area, with over 30 youth participating in a peer-led "Making Healthy Connections" network
  - MRC supported Easter Seals once again in its popular Youth Leadership Forum. Easter Seals, in addition to collaborating with MRC, works with the Boston Center for Independent Living, the Institute for Human Centered Design, the Institute for Community Inclusion, Partners for Youth with Disabilities and the Center for Human Development, to conduct this 3 day forum that connects youth with disabilities to peer mentors and role models to promote job readiness, civic engagement and policy advocacy

- MRC now supports a year-round Youth Leadership Network, in conjunction with Easter Seals, and has supported the expansion to four locations statewide
- MRC began the implementation of the MFP Community Living Waiver in FY'14 and is now providing services in the community or assistance to move from Nursing Home to the community to over 400 individuals statewide. Waiver Case Managers have and will continue to work extensively with families of waiver participants leaving skilled nursing facilities to live in community settings. Community settings have included individual apartments and return to the family home. Family members of waiver participants have received support, guidance, education and assistance in coordination of services, particularly in cases where the participant was transitioning to a family home. Additionally, the MFP Community Living Waiver includes, as a paid service "Family Training" that is designed to "provide training and instruction about the treatment regimes, behavior plans, and the use of specialized equipment that supports the waiver participant to participate in the community. Community/Residential Family Training may also include training in family leadership, support of self-advocacy, and independence for the family member." There are currently five Family Training Providers qualified by UMass and approved as MassHealth providers to MFP participants. MRC will continue to work with UMass and MassHealth to identify and support new individuals and organizations that may be qualified to provide this Family Training support to waiver participants and their families.

#### **IV. FAMILY SUPPORT RESOURCES AND FUNDING:**

MRC continues its commitment to maximizing efficiency of available resources for the benefit of individuals with disabilities. This involves gaining a comprehensive understanding of need, as is gathered through all means of substantial consultation described above, and then collaborating with partner agencies and organizations to either develop new resources, supports and services, or to adapt existing resources to meet the needs of those with disabilities. Additionally, this entails ensuring that consumers have the knowledge of, and access to, these resources. As an example, MRC worked with The Executive Office of Health and Human Services, MassHealth, UMASS, and other state disability agencies to develop and implement the Money Follows the Person Waivers. These Waivers include the availability of such services as Respite Care, Individual Supports, Family Training Supports, Home and Vehicle modifications, among others. This expansion of services, beyond what has been available through MassHealth State Plan and disability agencies, makes community living an option for many who might otherwise be destined to live in facilities. Among those served through these waivers are individuals who choose to return to a family home, youth who have graduated from the Mass Hospital School, and

others in nursing homes who choose to live in their own homes or apartments in the community. MRC actively outreaches to organizations and communities about this waiver and as a result is filling available Community Living slots at a rapid pace.

MRC's Independent Living and Assistive Technology Department's REquipment Program works to refurbish and redistribute assistive technology devices and durable medical equipment to consumers in need. While Requipment serves people across the lifespan, it is often utilized by families with children with disabilities who outgrow devices and are now able to pass them along to others in need. Requipment staff are actively engaged with community organizations to provide outreach and information about the process for both donating and receiving equipment.

Additionally, MRC continues to be involved in partnerships and initiatives aimed at expanding services and ensuring that the right services get to those in need in a timely manner. In FY'15, this has included:

- Working with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EHS), MassHealth, the Executive of Elder Affairs (EOEA), and other state disability agencies on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) funded Balancing Incentive Program (BIP). The goals of the BIP project in Massachusetts include expanding and improving upon the "No Wrong Door" system for accessing Home and Community Based Services, currently implemented through the MRC supported Aging and Disability Resource Consortia (ADRC), developing standardized functional needs assessment domains, and ensuring the provision of conflict-free case management
- Partnering with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide professional development and family engagement supports to Secondary Transition Staff in six school districts.
- Collaborating with MassHealth and other state agencies to implement the Money Follows the Person and the Acquired Brain Injury Waivers, both of which expand services and supports available to eligible consumers
- Beyond the Waiver Services, the Money Follows the Person grant allows for the development of new demonstration services, including the short-term supports needed to transition from nursing home to community living, orientation and mobility training, and time-limited case management. This Case Management is provided by MRC. Additionally, MRC collaborates with the MassHealth MFP Project Team to ensure that there is substantial consultation throughout the development and implementation of MFP Services, namely through its active and engaged Stakeholder group
- MRC consistently seeks out other sources of funding to maintain and whenever possible, expand services to reach more people in need. This has included use

of Federal Grants for Assistive Technology and the ADRCs, and receipt of a HRSA grant to improve upon services available to elders with Brain Injury through a needs assessment, staff training and consultation.

- In effort to continuously improve services to targeted populations, MRC partners with community based disability organizations to identify unmet needs, define best practices, and implement staff training. MRC continues to collaborate with the Asperger/Autism Network (AANE) for staff training and consultation to ensure staff are able to address the needs of this unique and often under-served population.

## **V. ACCESSING SERVICES AND SUPPORT:**

In effort to expand and improve upon methods of increasing awareness of service availability to its constituents, MRC continues to support various methods of outreach and education about available services and supports, including, but not limited to families. This includes:

- Contracting with UMass to support the Massachusetts Network of Information Providers (MNIP)
- Using the Annual Consumer Conference to outreach to, inform and educate consumers about the wide range of available services, through workshops, information tables, and an Assistive Technology Resource Room
- Support to the Independent Living Centers and the ADRCs which provide extensive Information and Referral Services
- Collaborate with other state agencies to enhance the No Wrong Door concept and implement activities designed and funded through the Balancing Incentives Project.
- As the lead agency for Assistive Technology, support for MassMatch, GetATstuff.org, School Swap, the AT Demonstration and Loan Centers, and ReEquipment,
- MRC continues to support the MassAccess Housing Registry, a website that allows individuals with disabilities and their families to search for available housing that meet their geographic, accessibility and financial needs
- The Independent Living Centers, and their Long Term Care Options Counselors, now in conjunction with Money Follows the Person activities, continue to conduct outreach to individuals in nursing facilities, and in FY'15 have assisted over 210 individuals to transition successfully to community living, a 15% increase in successful transitions from Fy'14.

- The Vocational Rehabilitation division continues to ensure the presence of a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in every public high school in the state for the purposes of identifying students with disabilities and assisting them in accessing adult services by participating in transition plans whenever possible, and by providing information about MRC services.
- Through contracts with Independent Living Centers, MRC continues to support the Transition to Adulthood Programs that provide skills training, peer support, advocacy and information and referral to transition age youth with disabilities. Through skills training and exposure to adult peer role models, participants in these programs learn skills, develop confidence and learn about supports and services that may be available to them, to better prepare for independence. By having the knowledge of the types of supports available to them, how to access them, and seeing them in use by role models, they become equipped to make choices as they set their personal goals for independence. MRC continues to work with these programs to incorporate employment into the domains addressed in programming.

## **VI. CULTURALLY COMPETENT OUTREACH AND SUPPORT:**

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission is committed to facilitating access to services to those with disabilities from all communities. MRC employs Bilingual Counselors and Counselors for the Deaf (fluent in American Sign Language-ASL). In addition to ensuring a diverse and culturally competent staff, MRC contracts with providers to facilitate connections to services. For example:

- Application and outreach materials are available in multiple languages representing Massachusetts communities
- The agency contracts with services for over-the-phone translation and with several community organizations to provide face to face interpreter services
- In addition to having Counselors for the Deaf, the agency contracts for ASL interpreters when needed for individual and large group meetings, and ensures that all public events sponsored by the agency have ASL interpreters and CART reporters available.
- The Brain Injury and Statewide Specialized Community Services department conducts outreach to diverse communities on a regular basis, and has, as one of its core services, Cultural Facilitators contracted to assist consumers in connecting to services, programs and activities within their communities



- The Unserved/Underserved Subcommittee of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) works with the SRC to identify underserved populations and to develop recommendations of actions that MRC could take to increase access to and effectiveness of services to these groups.
- The agency worked with Partners for Youth with Disabilities to expand its service area to reach underserved communities including in the Springfield area.
- MRC also contracts with many multicultural service providers across the state, including a multicultural independent living center, several multicultural home care providers, and cultural facilitation providers, among others.

## **VII. INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION:**

As evidenced throughout this report, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission values interagency collaboration as a means of assuring the best possible array of services is made available to people with disabilities across the lifespan. To that end, MRC actively participates in cross-agency work groups and committees that address the needs of persons with disabilities, or ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities are included in program planning and activities. FY'15 interagency activities have included:

- Continued participation on interagency task forces and partnerships including: the Statewide Hoarding Task Force, the Health and Disability Partnership, the Partnership on Substance Abuse and Older Americans, Building Partnerships for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities, the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council, and the Interagency Council on Homelessness
- Planning and sponsorship of the consumer conference is now done in conjunction with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Statewide Independent Living Council and addresses the issues identified by this cross-disability group
- Active collaboration with EHS, MassHealth, UMass, multiple state agencies, and the MFP Stakeholders group as the result of implementing the Money Follows the Person Community Living Waiver

and overseeing the Demonstration Services to consumers transitioning to the community.

- MRC continues to work in conjunction with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, the Aging Services Access Points, and the Independent Living Centers in facilitating the ongoing development and operation of the Aging and Disability Resource Consortia (ADRCs) across the state
- MRC is actively involved in the Balancing Incentive Program, along with multiple state agencies as it works to develop strategies for increasing availability of home and community based services to allow more people with disabilities to remain living in the community and to rebalance Medicaid spending in favor of community options over facility-based care.
- As MRC has collaborated with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in its efforts to improve coordination of transition services for youth with disabilities; MRC is now a partner with DESE on the implementation of a grant to provide professional development for High School Transition Staff in six local school districts
- MRC Program Directors and Area Directors regularly collaborate with the other state disability agencies, MassHealth and the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, to ensure communication, proper referrals for services, and when necessary, coordination of services. This is done through meetings, in-services, cross-agency training and Interagency Service Agreements, such as with MassHealth for the implementation of Waivers, and Memoranda of Understanding such as with the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and MRC's Vocational Rehabilitation Division addressing the provision of vocational rehabilitation services and on-going supports to consumers who are eligible for DDS services
- In response to the Workforce Investment and Opportunities Act (WIOA) requirements, MRC is further strengthening relationships, through Memoranda of Understanding agreements with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, The Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Department of Developmental Services, the Department of Mental Health, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind and the Massachusetts

Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing to identify specific ways in which the MRC will collaborate with each agency on vocational related services to transition age youth.

## **GOALS FOR FY'16:**

In addition to continuing the myriad of programs and services already described in this report, MRC has set specific goals for FY'16 for service expansion, enhancement or coordination that will further improve the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families:

- MRC will be an active participant, along with other EHS agencies and a broad range of stakeholders, in the development and implementation of the goals defined in the workplan to be established by the Balancing Initiatives Program.
- MRC will work with AANE to develop and pilot a Job Readiness Assessment Tool to specifically assess the skills, strengths, and areas of need, of individuals on the Autism Spectrum who are working with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to identify employment goals and develop plans for seeking and attaining employment.
- As a partner with DESE on the project to enhance transition planning and service coordination in 6 targeted school districts, MRC will build upon existing collaborations with these districts by providing or coordinating in-services to Secondary Transition staff in these districts on all of MRC programs and disability or resource-specific topics aimed at enhancing school districts' capability to prepare their students with disabilities for transition from school to adult life. As with previous Transition activities in which MRC has been involved, the ultimate goal will be to define best practices that can be replicated throughout the state, and to establish relationships that can be built upon for the purposes of facilitating the process of transitioning youth with disabilities from school to adult life, into appropriate systems of care or support, and to develop a standard training curriculum that can be made available on-line.
- MRC will hire 3 Benefits Specialists, specifically trained in addressing the issues pertinent to families with transition age youth. These specialists will be assigned to each of the Districts and will collaborate with local parent, family and community organizations to provide information and outreach about the consultative services that can be provided to youth and their families, further

empowering youth and their families with information about the impact of work income on other benefits.

- MRC will collaborate with provider organizations to develop a network of providers of Pre-Employment and Training Services to transition age youth as they begin to engage in the Vocational Rehabilitation process and start to explore and prepare for the world of work. These new services will serve to increase the engagement and participation of youth in the process of becoming job-ready and being more able to effectively utilize the employment counseling and services available through the Vocational Rehabilitation System.